Executive Director’s Informational Briefing to the Committee of Permanent Representatives

Statement

By

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Agenda Item 3

Extra-ordinary Meeting of the CPR: 8 April 2013
Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Colleagues,

Thank you for attending this extraordinary session of the CPR, the last before the Governing Council.

In a few days, we will have the pleasure to open the session in the exceptional scenario of Nairobi. I should take this opportunity to express my sincere congratulations to the Kenyan people and Government for successfully concluding the elections process in a largely peaceful manner that reflects the will of the people, and is accepted across the country.

I would like to express my most sincere appreciation for your work and support in the last weeks to prepare a fruitful Governing Council. All discussions and debates have been extraordinarily rich and relevant.

We have had some particularly good debates in the Regional Groups meetings, and the last CPR. A great number of issues have been raised, including by the Africa Group, for which I am very grateful. We have another opportunity today to go into further depth, although as ever, our time is limited. We are committed as an organisation however to engaging in these discussions in any number of different ways.

At any rate, I propose now to go through some of the issues raised in recent meetings. I apologise if there is not enough time to deal with them all, but we can address them further in our discussions, through written updates and so on.

This Governing Council presents an excellent opportunity to turn the hard work of the last two years, for which you have provided fantastic support, into a reality on the ground.

Last week I was with the Secretary General marking the 1,000 days to the Millennium Development Goals deadline. We are also in the process of debating the Post 2015 Development Agenda. It is a crucial moment to join efforts to improve the life of those who are suffering poverty, inequalities and the lack of human rights.

We have seen urbanization being the main tool of every major process of accelerated development in the modern era, from the start of the industrial revolution in Britain to the dramatic surge of China, which still continues. We see this across Asia. We see this now in many places in Africa. The ‘new urban agenda’ is one of the most powerful tools imaginable for poverty reduction and development.

UN-Habitat has a unique position in this crucial moment. This Governing Council should leave UN-Habitat in a stronger position on the policy, operational, financial and institutional front that it was at the beginning. The purpose of this is to deliver on UN-Habitat’s mandate in a better way than ever, and contribute to sustainable development.

It is a huge task, but I am very optimistic about how our Governing Council will go. There will be different opinions and room for agreements and disagreements. I would be disappointed if there wasn’t, as this is where our most productive and constructive work can be done. I look forward to your guidance and any questions you might have, and we will do our best to answer them.

As you know, one of my main goals has been to make UN-Habitat a more transparent organization. In this spirit, I am honored to address some of the issues raised during the discussions on the work programme and budget resolution.
I would like to start by reassuring you in the most direct way that UN-Habitat is not ‘watering down’ its basic mandate. On the contrary, we are doubling our commitment. This is no idle statement – I expect you, friends and colleagues, to hold me and the agency I lead to account in delivering on this pledge.

As you will have seen in our resource mobilization strategy, we define ‘urbanisation’ as encompassing all levels of human settlements – all the way from communities through to megacities. Urbanisation is all about the changing dynamics between those communities: how poverty can be reduced, development accelerated, wealth and human capital developed. I welcome further discussion on this critical point.

We continue to stress our commitment to addressing urban poverty, inequality, slums and lack of access to basic services concurrently with strategic urban planning, governance and economy. This balanced approach is critical if we are to facilitate the urban poor to break from the cycle of poverty. Similarly, we believe that responding to urgent basic needs requires nurturing sound systems of governance and management.

We want to build UN-Habitat’s work more tightly into national and local government planning cycles. Governments are already turning to the key question of how to meet the challenges and needs already identified – we see our partnership growing based on greater synchronization in this area. Improved participation in UN Development Assistance Frameworks is one way to achieve this.

In general, we are well aware of our portfolio’s distribution, including the strong performance in post conflict and post disaster areas. I want to be very clear that these programmes have largely been led by urgent national priorities of the countries involved.

Nevertheless, we want to sharply increase our development portfolio. We see great demand already for our services from national and local governments across our main areas of operation. We can provide support directly to municipalities, Ministries and other partners in national and local urban planning, and planned city extensions. Smart approaches to urban economy and basic services are integral parts of this thinking.

We see great opportunity in developing country, or multi-country programmes across thematic areas, based on the support and participation of multiple development partners. These programmes can and should be based on tangible results at outcome level. They must be built on the central principle of linking the normative work of UN-Habitat to technical cooperation in developing countries. They must be built on the key objectives of replication and scaling up, of knowledge management, of South – South cooperation. They must lead to policy development and legislation based on demonstrated success, rather than dry policy seminars and workshops.

With the GC’s blessing, we plan to accelerate the development of these programmes in the second half of the year.

As I have just mentioned, we have, as requested, provided you with a resource mobilization strategy for UN-Habitat in the next two years. It provides a clear way forward to addressing our resource constraints in the short term, while building our financial viability in the medium term. I have already taken steps to move to the next stage, which is to put this plan into action. We will be joined during the Governing Council by an expert consultant, who will work with us in putting this strategy into practice, right across the organization. Your comments, ideas, suggestions will be part of the success of this strategy. I encourage you to read it carefully, as we depend on our partnership with you to make this strategy a success.
As you may recall, the General Assembly requested me, as Secretary-General of the third United Nations Conference on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III), to prepare, using the expertise of the United Nations system, a proposal for consideration by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat at its twenty-fourth session, as to how best to provide inputs for and support to the preparatory process of the conference in the most inclusive, efficient, effective and improved manner.

The General Assembly expects me to proceed with implementation of the proposal soon after its approval by the Governing Council. I am grateful for the inputs that CPR members have already made during the CPR Working Group discussion of the Habitat III draft resolution.

As you already know, the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee (Prepcom) for Habitat III will be held in New York in 2014 at the beginning of the 69th session of the General Assembly. The second meeting of the Prepcom will be held here in Nairobi in 2015 at the time of the 25th session of the Governing Council. To prepare for these meetings, we have made specific proposals on the basic documentation required at the national, regional and international levels. We have also proposed inclusive methods and mechanisms for the preparation of this documentation – methods and mechanisms that will ensure the full participation of local authorities, all other Habitat Agenda partners and the UN system. In addition, we have suggested a number of meetings to be held between June 2013 and April 2015, taking full advantage of already scheduled meetings of intergovernmental regional bodies such as AMCHUD, APMCHUD and MINURV.

As decided by the General Assembly, we shall also take full advantage of the seventh session of the World Urban Forum to be held in Medellin, Colombia, in April 2014. Other global and regional meetings will be virtual, making full use of internet-based platforms for dialogue and sharing of information. All meetings will of course be paper-smart. We have tried as much as possible to ensure that the UN’s inputs into the preparatory process for Habitat III will be evidence-based and cost effective. Our proposals are also intended to reduce the burden of preparatory work on Governments.

We have already taken steps to set up the Habitat III Trust Fund, including the preparation of a comprehensive budget for the whole preparatory process of the Conference. I trust I can count on the support of all of your Governments throughout the journey towards Habitat III, and I greatly appreciate the help of the CPR to date. In particular, I would like to call upon all Governments to make voluntary contributions to the Habitat III Trust Fund to enable us to start preparatory work as soon as possible. We are working together with our colleagues in the Department of Management in New York to ensure that some of the resource needs for Habitat III are included in our proposed Programme Budget for 2014-2015.

I spoke earlier about the need for UN-Habitat to move forward quickly in responding to the demand for its services in the 21st Century. We have already benefitted from your support as the CPR and explicit approval for the major substantive improvements we have made in our work. We have already seen verifiable improvements in our work in the field, less stovepiping between substantive areas, better connections between normative work and technical cooperation. But this is not enough for me or the organization, especially if we are to ‘double down’ on our development work, and strengthen it in its rightful place at the center of the organization’s thinking.

As we emerge from the GC, we look forward to matching organizational arrangements with the substantive work of the organization. We expect to develop in close cooperation with UNON at HQ, and UNOPS and UNDP in the field, improved
measures that will strengthen our efficiency and effectiveness. I want to be clear that this is intended to apply across the organization, not just for emergency related work. Our positioning as a focused, mandate led agency requires business processes that reduce cost and increase speed, and thus deliver value for money for hard earned national resources. We also need to ensure that internal management arrangements are clear, accountable and transparent, and I look forward to carrying out this key responsibility as Executive Director in the second quarter of this year. We will do this in close consultation with the relevant staff bodies.

We have had very positive discussions with UNON in particular in this respect. We have agreed on a way to move forward, and will tap the experience of other Secretariat bodies who have successfully managed the same questions.

We will shortly distribute a two page document that summarises the steps taken so far. I am happy to spend as long as is required to discuss this critical point, as it is vital that we work together closely as delegations arrive from capitals for the GC.

On rights based approaches, I should clarify that we agree that UN-Habitat does not intend to introduce new human rights resolutions or approaches. We do have an obligation to take into account GA mandated approaches within our area of operations, and we are comfortable with the language endorsed by the CPR in Strategic Plan.

Moving forward, I hope that I can count on your support and active engagement on tangible measures that can be taken to strengthen UN-Habitat. We have been asked in many quarters for ideas on what can be done, for which I am very grateful. We have some specific ideas in this respect, and we hope sincerely that these ideas can have the widest support possible. There may be different views on what is the best way to achieve certain objectives, and it is important that these are debated openly. There has already been some discussion about the possibility of a ‘Strengthening the Organisation’ resolution. This would be very welcome, and perhaps I can share some thoughts.

UN-Habitat will greatly benefit from a ‘joined up’ approach to this issue. By linking a number of measures that support substantive issues, operational effectiveness, finances, increased engagement by the Governing Council and CPR in the challenges facing the organization, we can measure over time how we improve in delivering services where required.

One issue that has caused vibrant debate has been the issue of Governance reform, which you will recall was triggered by member states in 2009. We have gone through our own thinking and questioning around these issues, as have many of you. We have focused strongly on presenting options to the CPR and GC. We are very grateful for the leadership of Amb. Poulsen in this regard, and the work of the facilitators.

In the end, we believe that it is important to give the best possible chance both to the facilitation process agreed on by the CPR and debate during the GC itself. We stand ready to provide any technical support to this process, and look forward to its conclusion.

It is also important that we look at measures to strengthen our financial situation, particularly in our core budget that is normally financed through the UN-Habitat Foundation. Our thinking is laid out in quite some detail in our resource mobilization strategy, which I will not repeat here. But with all the measures that we are taking, it is important for me to encourage member states to agree on the need to widen the resource base of UN-Habitat, particularly through the idea of minimum contributions to
the organization. If this crucial idea can be agreed, then there are a number of measures we could look at HOW this could be achieved.

Excellencies, this is a time of transition for UN-Habitat, which can often be hard to manage. But I am very optimistic that transition is good for our organization. It is with this in mind that I ask sincerely for your support – not to agree with everything we say, but to make the most of this GC, to get tangible outcomes, to take measurable steps to strengthen our organization.

I will be at your service throughout this period, along with my senior management team. Above all, however, I hope we can continue the constructive and thoughtful dialogue of the last few weeks after the GC has finished. We have a unique position here in Nairobi, and I for one would like to take greater advantage of it in strengthening our relationship and cooperation.